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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0871
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0811
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0513
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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS AARON COPE AND IO/UNP PAUL WICKBERG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2018

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE RESPONSE: REFERENDUM IN BURMA

REF: STATE 26677

Classified By: Political Officer Stephen Anderson, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel points to MFA Southeast Asia Office Director Alberto Vecchi March 17 and urged Italy to speak out about concerns over the Burmese regime's announced constitutional referendum. Vecchi, who returned February 29 from a week-long trip to Burma, said Italy agreed with our concerns about the constitutional referendum and the lack of cooperation with the UN Good Offices mission, but he was pessimistic about the likelihood of affecting change. He said we had to be realistic about the influence that Europe and the United States could exert on the regime. Neighboring countries had much more pull, but recent events in Tibet made it very unlikely we could count on any help from the Chinese.

¶2. (C) Vecchi said that the likely scenario would be a referendum that was neither free nor fair, that would lead to imperfect elections in 2010. He was doubtful that a "vote no" campaign would be successful even without manipulation of the vote. He said his meeting with the NLD "uncles" during his trip to Burma had reinforced his perception that the opposition is weak. Vecchi said additional sanctions must remain a possibility, but suggested it was best to wait until after the referendum.

¶3. (C) In a separate meeting March 19, poloff delivered ref points to MFA UN Affairs Desk Officer Leonardo Bencini, who said Italy would be supportive of our efforts to issue a UNSC Presidential Statement on the regime's handling of UN Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari's last trip to Burma. Bencini agreed that the Council needed to respond to the junta's uncooperative behavior.

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